



1866 Esperanza School and Spicewood Springs

txcompost.blogspot.com/2017/02/1866-esperanza-school-and-spicewood.html

This is a slightly expanded and annotated version of my history article for the February 2017 issue of the [NWACA Newsletter](#)

In Mary Starr Barkley's History of Travis County and Austin she notes that schools and churches were the centers of communities during the years of the Texas Republic and early statehood. For our neighborhood that school was Esperanza School, a one room log cabin. That log cabin still exists, and is located in Zilker Park, but its original location was near Spicewood Springs. The Texas Historical Commission historical marker in front of the cabin reads [1][2]:

Esperanza School Building. One of earliest one-room rural schoolhouse in Travis County, this cabin was built on property of Richard McKenzie in 1866. It was known as Esperanza School and served children from neighboring farms in the period before public education. In 1893 when a larger Esperanza School was built at another site this original log structure was put to other uses.. (Original site of this cabin was in the NW quadrant of the intersection of Spicewood Springs Rd. and Mopac Blvd.)



The "chain of title" for the property where the school was located goes back to the Mexican title from the State of Coahuila and Texas to one Thomas Jefferson Chambers, dated 1835. But by 1866, the year the original log cabin was built, the property belonged to a Richard McKenzie. The building was most likely constructed by the McKenzie family and neighbors from materials at hand as a school building for their children. The architecture was typical log cabin type construction; a one-room structure.

Over the years, the old school building changed owners, locations and purposes. The heirs of McKenzie sold the land and old school building to John Krebs in 1901. Krebs may have used the former school as a smoke house. Sometime before 1940 Krebs moved the old log cabin from its original location at the "top of the hill" overlooking Spicewood Springs – along today's Starline Drive -- to near the intersection of the Spicewood Springs Road and "Balcones Trail" (today's MoPac Service Road). Changing owners several more times the old building was relocated to yet another spot on Balcones Trail where it served as a dress shop, and again to Wabash Street, just south of West 34th, where it was used again for teaching.

The old school building moved one last time from its location on Wabash Avenue when it was donated to the City of Austin and relocated to Zilker Park's Botanical Garden as an example of an early Travis County pioneer building. The school's historical marker was approved by the Texas Historical Commission in 1974.

So why not saddle your horse and ride down to Zilker Park and take a look at a bit of our neighborhood's past. Peek inside the old one-room Esperanza School log cabin, and when you do consider this: an article in the Austin Weekly Statesman in 1888 reporting attendance status on various county schools put "District No. 7 - Spicewood Springs" at 48 children; picture if you will 48 kids and a teacher packed into this one room cabin. Now THAT is school overcrowding!

Photos

Footnotes, References

[1] Quotations and information provided here are from the historic marker application submitted to the Texas Historical Commission; see Historic Marker Application: Esperanza School Building

<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth491592/>

[2] See more about the historical marker itself here

<http://www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?marker=79395>



Esperanza School



View inside



Axe marks on hand hewn logs; back looking toward chimney